

The Indian King Tavern
Haddonfield, Camden County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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The Indian King Tavern
Haddonfield, Camden County, New Jersey

Owner: State of New Jersey

Date of Erection: 1750

Architect:

Builder: Matthias Aspden

Present Condition: Good

Number of Stories: Three

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - stucco over
brick

Interior walls - plaster

Inside brick chimneys

Roof - pitch, with dormers on
lower section; pent roof
between first and second
floors front

Historical Data:

The Indian King, which was not the first tavern in Haddonfield, was built by Matthias Aspden in 1750. The first license granted in the town of Haddonfield was to Thomas Perrywebb. There was at least one other building in Haddonfield used as a tavern before the Revolution. On the site of the present building was born Colonel Timothy Matlack Free Quaker, Commissary General of the Army, Master of the Rolls of Pennsylvania. Mills following

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some of the older writers credits the building of the tavern to Timothy Matlack. Prowell gives the date 1750 and names the builder as Timothy Matlack; he also gives the name as the American House. He further states that it was sold soon after to Matthias Aspden and that Matthias, Jr., sold it to Thomas Rodman in 1757 who in turn sold it to Hugh Creighton, who held it from 1754 to 1790. There are those who believe that this is the correct version of the story and that Matthias Aspden brought the sign "Indian King" from the tavern that he was suppose to have conducted across the street to this building. The tavern was known by names other than that of the Indian King. The Indian King first appears in newspaper advertisements of 1764.

The property passed from Hugh Creighton to Samuel Denny, and from Denny in 1805 to John Roberts. The building had many owners during the nineteenth century. The last to keep the house as a hotel was George Higby. In 1880 the town voted no license.

The first assembly of the State of New Jersey was held here from January 29, 1777 to March 18, 1777, and again in the same year from May 7 to June 7, and from September 3 to October 11. On March 15, 1777, the Council of Safety for the State of New Jersey was created by the Legislature while in session here. On September 20, of the same year, an act was passed which said, "From and after the Publication of this Act all the Commissions and Writs which by the Constitution are required to run in the name of the Colony shall run in the name of the State of New Jersey."

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In May, 1777, the Great Seal was formally adopted at Haddonfield. The Seal was executed by Du Simitiere. On September 20, 1777, the legislature made Continental bills legal tender. The Council of Safety met at the Indian King from March 15 to October 8, 1778. There were twelve members of the Council with Governor Livingston as president, and they held daily sessions. The Council of Safety held their first meeting on the eighteenth of March.

Many interesting military letters were dated at Haddonfield; some probably from the Indian King. Among the writers were Wayne, Lafayette, Pulaski, Weddon, Varnum, Ogden, Joseph Ellis, and other officers of the American Army; also orders, letters, and journals of Sir Henry Clinton, Major Andre, and others of the British Army.

Dolly Todd (nee Payne) visited her uncle Hugh Creighton here after she became a widow. Later she married James Madison, the fourth president of the United States. Hugh Creighton, her uncle, as well as Dolly herself were Quakers, but apparently they were not strictly Orthodox in their beliefs.

In 1902 the Legislature appointed a committee to purchase the property. Later on an appropriation was made for this purpose and for its restoration; this was done in 1908. The building is now used as a museum and is open to the public.

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Supervising Historian

Approved:


SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, A.I.A.
District Officer

Rev. Jan. 25.31 - TWC

A D D E N D U M

The following letter describing the "restoration" of the Indian King Tavern has come to our attention since the composition of our original report (in which no mention of restoration appeared) and is here quoted as of value to the architectural history of the subject.

Letter from Jno. R. Stevenson, Haddonfield, N.J., 2 May 1910, to Wm. Nelson, published with two photographs of the houses, before and after restoration, in Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society, 3rd series, VII, 98, under the title "Two Old West Jersey Houses".

"A photo of the old tavern house just restored to its original condition. As a boy 65 years ago, I used to play in it before any alteration had been made. I can vouch for the accuracy of the restoration. Fortunately the changes which had been made in 1885 were confined entirely to the third floor by raising the roof and to the front porch. During the work some interesting things were developed. The three storied end had been built first in 1750, as marked upon it, but it was then only 28 feet deep instead of 36 feet as it is now, and you may notice that the chimney stands in the center of the 28 feet. There was no stairway in it except from the second to the third floor, but access to it was from an adjoining house, probably frame, which is mentioned in the deed.

"Now Matthias Aspden's (the builder's) will is dated in 1764 and it specifically names the whole building and the store adjoining (just torn down*). Business growing, he did what a business man of means would do, he enlarged the tavern, tearing down the original frame house and building up the present two and a half storied brick end, making it 36 feet deep, taking out all the rear wall of the three storied section and deepening the building to 36 feet to correspond.

*The demolition of this store shown in one of the photos as a two story building having a remarkable half gambrel roof leaning against the end of the three story tavern, is unexplained in this letter, and is a decided loss. The unusually wide chimney erected at the other end of the two story unit of the tavern as "restored" does not appear authentic; more likely the original flues were drawn closer together above the roof if not two separate chimneys. L.D.C.

"If you will examine the photo you will see that the slope of the back roof droops to the second floor, making the rear eaves level across the entire building. That the store was built at the same time is proved, as the new exposed end for 28 feet is an outside wall of carefully laid hard brick, while the other 8 feet is of rough salmon brick plastered over.

"The large room in which the Provincial Congress of New Jersey met in 1777 was built for a ballroom and I can not find that any public meeting was ever held in it until the Congress assembled. The minutes of Newton Township, 1720-1820, say that their meetings when in Haddonfield were held in the Quaker Meeting House until 1787.

Lewis D. Cook
Supervising Historian 28 July 1941